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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0535  
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 8079  
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 2394  
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI PRIORITY 0247  
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 1697  
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 DAMASCUS 000344

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/11/2028  
TAGS: [EAIR](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [GE](#) [SP](#) [SY](#)  
SUBJECT: MAY 7 FELTMAN-SHAPIRO MEETING IN DAMASCUS: SYRIA  
WANTS HELP WITH CIVIL AVIATION WAIVERS

REF: A. DAMASCUS 192  
[1](#)B. DAMASCUS 286

Classified By: CDA Maura Connelly, Reasons 1.4 b and d.

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Summary: In a lengthy May 7 discussion on differing U.S. and Syrian approaches to re-engagement, NEA Acting Assistant Secretary Feltman and NSC/NENA Senior Director Shapiro explained the routine, technical nature of USG's renewal of Executive Order 13338 and agreed to look for possible ways to help Syria acquire civil aviation spare parts and maintenance services allowed under U.S. sanctions law. The Syrian side led by FM Muallim complained repeatedly that the re-certification of E.O. 13338 would send a negative political and economic message at a time when Syria had clearly demonstrated its desire to establish better relations with the U.S. Muallim acknowledged that lifting sanctions was Washington's decision, but he argued Syrians would read it as a decision to extend the confrontational policies of previous administrations. Muallim pushed for U.S. assistance in convincing French, German, and Spanish aerospace firms that the U.S. had no objection to their applying for export licenses that would allow them to service Airbus and Dassault planes. End Summary

[1](#)2. (S/NF) Returning to Damascus two months after their March 7 visit, NEA Acting Assistant Secretary Jeffrey Feltman and NSC Senior Director for the Middle East and North Africa Dan Shapiro met May 7 for four hours with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallim, Vice Foreign Minister Faisal Miqdad, and the President Asad's Political and Media Advisor Bouthayna Shaaban. This cable focuses on their discussions on sanctions. It should be read with septel reports on general views of re-engagement, Iraq, Palestinian reconciliation,

Syrian-Israeli peace discussions, Iran, and human rights.

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Renewal of E.O. 13338  
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13. (S/NF) Acting A/S Feltman told Muallim he and NSC Senior Director Shapiro had sought to schedule their visit the previous week to discuss the pending renewal of E.O. 13338 with the Syrian government directly, not through the media. President Asad's travel to Europe had, however, precluded this possibility. The President would be informing Congress on his decision to renew E.O. 13338. Syrian officials were transparent about their support of armed Arab "resistance" to Israeli occupation, and the U.S. was equally transparent about its concerns about Syria's support of Hizballah and Hamas. The Syria Accountability Act was U.S. law, and the Executive Branch was required to implement this law. Feltman said he understood this decision would be unwelcome in Syria, but the decision was at the heart of issues still dividing the two countries. The decision did not preclude the possibility of more flexible interpretations in the future or treating civil aviation issues differently.

14. (S/NF) Muallim, echoed by Vice FM Miqdad and Presidential Advisor Shaaban, argued that the sanctions renewal represented a continuation of the previous administration's policy and raised doubts about the new administration's intention to engage Syria. Muallim acknowledged that the sanctions issue was a Washington

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prerogative, but said continuation of sanctions would impede establishment of a "normal" bilateral relationship. European firms would react very negatively to the renewal of E.O. 13338, regardless of the administration's desire to be more helpful on civil aviation, Muallim asserted.

15. (S/NF) Feltman said he understood the problem. He pointed out that the new administration had articulated a broad vision for a new foreign policy approach based on principled and sustained engagement. Despite differences with Syria over its support of Hizballah and Hamas, the President had used a language of respect. Feltman and Shapiro said they had explained during their March 7 meeting that the U.S. had no intention of using civil aviation or safety-of-flight issues as a political lever. They had agreed, at Muallim's request, to look into Syria's problems with a German firm (Lufthansa Techniq) contracted to perform maintenance on Syrian Air Airbus engines (ref A). In addition, the Embassy had met April 15 with Vice Minister Miqdad and officials from Syrian Air to discuss several other civil aviation issues, including Lufthansa Techniq, in greater detail (Ref B). The common problem seemed to be that European firms contracted by Syrian Air had not yet applied for the necessary export licenses through the U.S. Department of Commerce. Under U.S. regulations, these companies needed to consult Commerce.

16. (S/NF) Muallim replied that these companies were already very reluctant to expose themselves to possible USG legal action because of the strict policies of the previous administration. The renewal of E.O. 13338 would make them even more reluctant. Muallim asked several times for U.S. assistance in communicating to these firms that the renewal of E.O. 13338 did not mean the U.S. government would take an unfavorable view of their desire to perform maintenance on civilian aircraft allowed under U.S. law. Feltman and Shapiro repeated that U.S. legal procedures required the firms themselves to contact the Department of Commerce. Since they had a business interest in doing so, it was incumbent on them to request Commerce's advice on how to proceed. "They're afraid," replied Muallim, "please help us."

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New Case: Syria's Problems with Dassault

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17. (S/NF) Muallim explained that, in addition to problems already discussed with the U.S., Syria had found it impossible to convince the French aerospace firm Dassault to seek the necessary licenses to perform maintenance on three Syrian-owned Falcon aircraft used by President Asad and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for official travel. Muallim said he had spoken to the French Ambassador in Damascus, who confirmed the company's unwillingness to risk possible USG actions against it as a consequence of seeking the necessary export licenses. Feltman replied that the Syrian government should encourage the French company to contact Commerce. Though he could not give a commitment on behalf of Commerce, the U.S. would be reasonable in considering legitimate safety-of-flight requests. The Charge added that Dassault could request an advisory opinion from Commerce to determine the need for an export license. If Dassault made such a request, Commerce could respond quickly.

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18. (S/NF) Muallim reviewed ongoing problems with Lufthansa Technik, which currently had possession of two Airbus engines belonging to Syrian Air. The German firm worried that, because it had accepted two engines without the necessary permission, asking for an export license now might lead to legal actions against it. "They are afraid," explained Muallim. Dassault was also reluctant to make contact with Commerce without assurances that doing so would not risk punitive USG actions. Muallim suggested the State Department or appropriate U.S. agency might inform these firms of the U.S. intent not to take hostile actions against them.

19. (S/NF) Feltman and Shapiro said they would look at possible ways to assist, subject to U.S. laws and regulations. They reminded Muallim that the European firms should be aware of President Obama's new approach to foreign policy and take that into consideration. Syrian officials should inform these companies not to assume negative answers.

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